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WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: POSTCARD FROM JACMEL: FRUSTRATION IN PROVINCES

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11. (U) Summary: The southern coastal city of Jacmel is struggling with insufficient funding from the central government, inadequate law enforcement, and Port-au-Prince corruption frightening off potential investors in Jacmel. Jacmel, however, has a unique advantage in the form of a wealthy mayor -- who likens himself to Barack Obama as an agent of change -- ready to deploy some of his own capital in the service of his city. The city's long-dormant tourist industry awaits investment. Sexual violence against women remains under-reported and under-prosecuted. End summary.

Portrait of a Small City Mayor

12. (U) The coastal city of Jacmel, population 50,000, is located two hours from Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince. Jacmel's current mayor, Edwin Zenny, a Haitian of Lebanese descent was elected in February 2007 with 76 percent of the vote. 'I grew up here,' he told Poloff, 'and I've been telling everyone since I was two years old that I'd be mayor someday. I'm kind of another Obama and bringing change.' A successful businessman by any standard, Mayor Zenny made his fortune selling Chinese-made motorcycles throughout Haiti and leverages his family's local history and financial security in ways not possible for mayors with comparatively fewer resources.

13. (U) When elected mayor, Mayor Zenny learned that Jacmel contained a total of 3000 USD in its tax collection fund; today, the account holds close to 70,000 USD. The mayor attributes this to fiscal transparency and the business community's ability to see that the funds are actively invested in improving infrastructure and bettering the local investment climate. Municipalities in Haiti are apportioned annual funds from the central government, however, since Zenny has taken office, Jacmel has received none of its allotment. Mayor Zenny is philosophical about the situation and considers it just one on a long list of the capital's transgressions against smaller municipalities. 'That's what makes this place different (Jacmel),' he says, 'We don't need them.'

14. (U) Many of the issues that continue to plague the rest of Haiti -- insufficient services, the rising cost of food and fuel, chronically high unemployment, instability and

insecurity -- also affect Jacmel. Security ranks high on the mayor's list of concerns, although Jacmel rarely experiences public demonstrations. The Mayor claims that non-locals are responsible for much of the city's crime. Despite the southern shore's reputation as a major drug-trafficking hub, even though the surrounding coastline is unpatrolled, neither Mayor Zenny nor the local police chief believes that Jacmel has a large narco-trafficking problem. The Mayor maintains that when Jacmel police seized two boats for suspected narcotics trafficking in 2007 and asked that Port-au-Prince direct Haiti's Coast Guard to patrol this section of the coast, the central government instead confiscated the boats for use in the capital.

15. (U) Mayor Zenny appears to run Jacmel in the 'big man' political tradition, building political capital and goodwill through spreading his personal wealth around the city. His car frequently transports desperately ill citizens to the hospital in Port-au-Prince; he also donates his 600 USD monthly salary to needy local people who appear on his doorstep. 'I don't need it,' he says, 'That's another difference between me and that guy (the mayor) in Les Cayes; he needs the money.' This September, when rising school tuition costs threatened to prevent many families from enrolling their children in school, Mayor Zenny organized 10,000 USD in donations from the business community and a matching donation from one of Jacmel's more famous supporters, hip-hop artist and Haitian, Wyclef Jean. When a visit to the extremely overcrowded and inadequate local prison revealed that prisoners slept on the floor for lack of beds, Mayor Zenny again solicited funds from local business people and Mr. Jean for their purchase. (Note: The prison currently holds 406 inmates -- more than three times its capacity of approximately one hundred. End note.)

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Law Enforcement

16. (U) The mayor regards MINUSTAH with ambivalence and reported that the peacekeepers' desire to pose for pictures with locals in front of the sea did not endear them to the community. Zenny claimed that MINUSTAH's African contingents are not very popular with local Jacmelians as they share few cultural interests. Local perceptions of MINUSTAH were further damaged when the U.N. force drove their armored vehicles through the middle of Jacmel's 2007 'Kids' Carnaval Parade.' Mayor Zenny also complained that MINUSTAH patrols conclude at 10:00 p.m. and that most crime in Jacmel occurs much later. Police Chief Alain Auguste, however, does not share the mayor's opinion and is keenly aware of Jacmel's dependence on the U.N. forces, telling Poloff, 'We have nothing and MINUSTAH offers us a lot of support and training.'

17. (U) Jacmel's police force remains severely understaffed and poorly equipped. 'The training is useful,' Police Chief Auguste added, 'but what we really need is the tools to do our jobs.' He stated that they lack such basic necessities as handcuffs, radios, sufficient uniforms, and flashlights. They communicate via cell phones for which they pay out-of-pocket. The entire department has just thirty police officers, a shortage of approximately 170, and they are 'on-call twenty-four hours a day, every day.' The chief reports that rape, theft, and murder are their most common arrests.

Centralization Blues

18. (U) The mayor's cousin, Amil Roland Zenny, is President of the Haitian Chamber of Commerce in the Southeast Department and the mayor's unofficial but widely recognized economic advisor. Mr. Zenny expressed frustration with the national government, voicing the belief that Port-au-Prince

prefers weak rural cities to sharing power with them. Echoing a widely held local hope that cruise ships will one day dock in Jacmel, Mr. Zenny remarked, 'Fifty boats pass by here every day, each with four hundred passengers. All we need is the government to put a breakwater in our port so that they can stop here. We can do the rest.

¶9. (U) 'The municipality must obtain permission and funding from the central government for major construction projects and simple repairs to infrastructure, and that support is often lacking. Three larger projects -- improvements to their local market, repairing the airport, and relocating a dangerous road prone to flooding away from riverbanks -- have all been ignored by the national government.

¶10. (U) Simple repairs to infrastructures go undone, leaving systems such as power generators in disrepair for long periods. Tankers with fuel for Jacmel's power generators often arrive only one third-full; Mr. Zenny suspects that many leave Port-au-Prince fully loaded and suffer pilferage en route, but since Port-au-Prince refused his requests for an accounting system, he cannot prove these suspicions. Jacmel continues to experience frequent power outages. Port-au-Prince authorities would not even allow Jacmel to rename a tourist-friendly 3 km stretch of road 'Carnaval Boulevard.' Instead, the central government assigned this name to a different, shorter stretch of road which cannot accommodate the popular annual festival.

¶11. (U) Actively seeking foreign investment in Jacmel, Mr. Zenny recounted numerous instances of the government's inability or unwillingness to support local efforts to improve living and economic conditions. For example, an ambulance donated from the U.S. sat in Haitian Customs for seven months before it was released. Golden Airlines of Miami committed to a Ft. Lauderdale-Jacmel flight, but, according to Mr. Zenny, it backed out of the deal when the owner refused to pay Port-au-Prince's request for an 'unofficial' 500,000 USD in extra fees. A planned housing development continues to lag in the capital administration

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even though Zenny reports that many of the ninety-four homes have been pre-sold to twenty-seven international doctors who regularly visit Jacmel as medical service donors and who are also funding the project.

Women's Groups Not So Positive

¶12. (U) Emilienne Jean-Marie and Manita Noel of NGO Faym Decide (Women Decide) do not believe that improvements in Jacmel extend to the social and economic status of women. The city's hospital, St. Michel, does not provide adequate maternal health care for pregnant women; and the hospital lacks equipment and expertise in female health care. Economically, the two report, women carry the main burden of providing basic subsistence and education for their children -- although this may ironically mean finding a man willing to contribute financially. The rising price of food is affecting their ability to feed their children. For example, a typical child's daily nourishment currently consists of a piece of bread in the morning and one hot meal of rice with a few beans in the evening. Women typically have their first child between the ages of sixteen and seventeen, in part due to lack of economic potential for independent financial security.

Comment

¶13. (U) Rape is a big concern for Jacmelian women and Police Chief Auguste. Although not subject to the same types of sexual violence prevalent in some parts of Port-au-Prince (such as targeted gang rape by criminal gangs), their concern is warranted. Victims of rape report that local residents,

even judges, often consider them at fault for being on the streets late at night. For these reasons, as well as social stigma, women are often reluctant to report attacks. Until the United Nations Development Fund for Women supported a legal advocacy program, victims found it difficult to pursue legal cases against perpetrators. Commonly-held beliefs attribute most rapes to outside visitors, but Jean-Marie and Noel express concern that step-daughters are uniquely vulnerable to intra-family sexual violence; mothers may not report their husbands if it means that they may lose their financial support, especially if they are pregnant.

¶14. (U) Jacmel faces the same governance challenges as most Haitian municipalities: centralized control of projects and financing from a corrupt and poorly functioning national government, exacerbated by insufficient tax revenue. The city may be unique, however, in the capability of its current administration head to deploy his personal resources to mitigate its dependency on national structures. A revitalized tax base and a steady increase in Carnival tourism one day could bring about an economic renaissance.
SANDERSON